

July 09, 2005 - Remarks at NEXUS Press Conference

Thank you for this warm reception. I am excited to take part in the ribbon cutting for the new "on-demand" NEXUS lane here at the Peace Bridge, and to update you on my efforts to expand the NEXUS program by establishing additional U.S.-based enrollment centers.

Tightening security along our vast northern border has been, and must continue to be, one of our nation's top homeland security priorities.

Yesterday's deadly attack in London only underscores our need remain vigilant and take all necessary measures to prevent future attacks from taking place on American soil.

And while taking every responsible measure to maximize the security of our borders, we must take care not to infringe on the rights of our citizens, we must guard against enacting measures that will unnecessarily stifle trade and tourism with our Canadian neighbors.

We must always strike the proper balance between security and freedom...Otherwise, the terrorists win.

That, in part, is why the NEXUS program is so important.

NEXUS allows us to effectively tighten the security of our borders, while at the same time, protecting the freedoms and the lively hoods of border region American and Canadian citizens and trusted travelers who cross our open borders frequently.

My congressional district, which includes Niagara Falls and Buffalo, serves as an annual gateway for 14.5 million individuals who enter the United States across the Niagara River bi-national bridges.

As a region that depends heavily on tourism, we cannot afford to choke our borders and make it more difficult for those who wish to visit Western New York.

Additionally, the region's border crossings play a vital role in U.S.-Canadian trade relations. Over 1.3 million trucks and 20 billion dollars of commerce pass over the Peace Bridge each year.

Border delays continue to cost our region - and the nation -- dearly. According to a recent report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. economy absorbs 40 percent of the current cost of border delays.

This means that the U.S. loses \$4.13 billion a year, or \$471,000 an hour, due to border congestion. If no action is taken to lessen border congestion, the U.S. stands to lose over 17,000 jobs by 2020 and 91,000 jobs by 2030.

One of the most important steps the U.S. and Canadian governments can take is to expand the NEXUS program. I am pleased that the Peace Bridge has taken a lead in utilizing the NEXUS program.

Fortunately, the NEXUS program has provided us with an opportunity to maintain a secure border without halting the free-flow of commerce. The NEXUS card provides one of the most comprehensive security checks of international travelers available today.

But to this point, the NEXUS program has remained under-utilized in Western New York. U.S. Customs and Border Protection - which manages the NEXUS program -- recently told me that this region has only enrolled 18,000 individual, compared to over 40,000 enrolled along the Washington/British of Columbia border.

The beauty of the NEXUS program, of course, is that the more people who use it, the fewer traditional customs inspections are needed and the fewer traffic delays are created.

Tourists who use NEXUS bypass the inspection delays, spending less time stuck in traffic and more time visiting Western New York and shopping in local stores.

Since NEXUS has very stringent enrollment requirements, our Customs and Border Patrol can concentrate their limited resources on screening individuals that pose potential risks to our security, and not on those we know are safe.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service recently reported that there are at least 50 terror

groups with a presence inside Canada. These groups are actively raising money, procuring weapons, and working to facilitate travel in and out of the United States.

And despite all of its clear benefits, to date, the NEXUS program continues to have the look and feel of a pilot program. Customs and Border Patrol has thus far failed to provide an enrollment center on this side of the border, forcing U.S. citizens to travel to Fort Erie, Canada to enroll in the program.

They have also failed to create a U.S. website or a workable customer-service number for Americans who desire more information on the program. Without a strong commitment from CBP, the NEXUS program cannot succeed.

For these reasons, I offered an amendment to the Homeland Security authorization bill that will expand the NEXUS program and make it more effective and more user-friendly.

I am proud to announce that this amendment recently passed the House of Representatives and will hopefully become law in the near future.

My amendment authorizes the creation of at least four new U.S. NEXUS enrollment centers in the United States. It will also create a customer-service phone number to resolve issues over the phone rather than an office visit. Finally, my amendment will create one consistent NEXUS card for land and air travelers.

All these measures are designed to expand the program and make it more accessible, more efficient and more effective.

But, I would like to add that creating new facilities is not enough, on its own, to increase the convenience and security of crossing our northern border.

Creating a truly secure environment requires your help.

American and Canadian travelers who frequently cross our northern border have a responsibility to make the effort to sign up for a NEXUS pass.

Getting a NEXUS pass will save travelers time and headache, but more importantly, trusted travelers will have the peace of mind that they are doing their part to contribute to the betterment of our national security... by enabling our brave customs and border patrol agents who protect our borders to more efficiently do their jobs.

Each NEXUS pass issued and used will mean that much less valuable border screening time has to be wasted on trusted travelers, and that much more energy and attention can be focused on securing our borders.

Thank you.